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TRANSCREATION AND THE PROFESSIONS

2014, Volume 7

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Table of Contents

Foreword - *Cinzia Spinzi* 7

Uncertainty in the Translation professions: time to transcreate?
Introduction by David Katan 10

A conversation between *Yves Gambier* and *Jeremy Munday*
about transcreation and the future of the professions 20

Crowd, cloud and automation in the translation education community
Christophe Declercq 37

Exploring the concept of transcreation – transcreation as 'more than translation'?
Daniel Pedersen 57

Exploring the Chinese translation of Australian Health Product Labels: Are they selling the same thing?
Jing Fang and *Zhongwei Song* 72

Strategies for the Audio Description of Brand Names
José Dávila-Montes and *Pilar Orero* 96

Translation and transcreation in the dubbing process.
A genetic approach.
Serenella Zanotti 109

Journalators?
An ethnographic study of British journalists who translate
Denise Filmer 135

Transcreating a new kind of humour: the case of Daniele Luttazzi
M. Cristina Caimotto 158

Notes on contributors 176

Guidelines for contributors 180

Transcreating a new kind of humour: the case of Daniele Luttazzi

M. Cristina Caimotto

Abstract

In 2010 a popular but controversial Italian comedian, Daniele Luttazzi, was accused of having plagiarized the works of a number of well-known American stand-up comedians. The issue was debated among non-professionals and generated discussions that would normally occupy academic gatherings, thus making more visible laypeople's notion of "translation". This paper aims to offer an overview of the various aspects of the case. First, a parallel is drawn between Luttazzi's transcreative process and that of 19th century Italian author Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, whose introduction of the Gothic tale to Italy as described in Venuti (1995) can be seen as analogous to Luttazzi's introduction of the dark humour typical of Anglo-American sketches into Italian comedy routines. The paper also offers an overview of the political background which influenced the debate about Luttazzi's work on both sides. Finally the role played by ComedySubs fansubbers is described together with the reporting of some of their reactions and comments, expressed both in public – on forums and social networks – and in private email interviews which were carried out for this research.

Luttazzi's humour is interesting for the Translation Studies scholar because his whole production is clearly influenced by Anglo-American comedians and the Italian public was not used to the humour he introduced. Although his work can be considered a form of infotainment, his style was so far removed from the expectations of Italian audiences that public opinion failed to rally to his support when he was attacked by politicians and his programmes were pulled off the air, making his position all the more difficult to defend. The aim of this work is to contribute to the debate about translation and copyright and to stir new debate on issues of translation and plagiarism: by pointing out what Luttazzi and Tarchetti have in common, the important role translation and transcreation can play in the dissemination of ideas and the spreading of critical awareness is highlighted and discussed.

> "One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest."
>
> T.S. Eliot, 1960, *The Sacred Wood* (127)

1. Introduction

The present paper was inspired by the case of a supposed international copyright infringement that was widely debated in Italy in 2010. The issues raised by this case show that the contradictions of copyright laws are still a reality. The paper starts by illustrating Venuti's work on the production of Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, a minor 19th century Italian author who wrote his own works and - at the same time - plagiarized, imitated and rewrote foreign works that he translated, or transcreated, from English into Italian. Tarchetti can be considered the author who had the merit of introducing the Gothic tale to Italy and, as Venuti (1995) explains, his works were an important vehicle for the introduction of new cultural elements, especially in terms of political awareness. If Tarchetti were alive and working today, he would probably be accused and prosecuted for copyright infringement, while back in 1865 he could safely pass his translated work off as his own without being found out, nor was there yet an Italian law against copyright infringement to prosecute him. His case is used here to present a reflection on the work of a contemporary Italian artist, Daniele Luttazzi, who, as this paper will demonstrate, has many points in common with Tarchetti.

Apart from contributing to the debate about translation and copyright, and to a new discussion on issues of translation and plagiarism, this case study is also an occasion to illustrate the attitude of the general public towards translation and dubbing. The analysis is focused on the reactions of those who contributed to create the scandal and the comments published on social networks. They are employed here to observe how most non-experts conceive the practice of translation, which, as expected,

can be very different from the way Translation Studies scholars envisage the work of a translator.

The paper starts by illustrating the contradictions of copyright laws and Venuti's notion of "foreignization", which is fundamental to understand the role that Tarchetti and Luttazzi have played in different fields. It then moves to the discussion of what role translation can play in the reshaping of a national canon and what influence it can have on the local culture, especially in terms of political issues. After having outlined Tarchetti's transcreation strategies and the points in common with Luttazzi's, the events concerning the latter are then detailed before moving on to the closing section, which focuses on the reactions of fans, amateur translators and the general public.

2. Copyright and Translation

The US Constitution, article I, section 8, states "The Congress shall have Power […] to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries". Many scholars argue that this position – which is not dissimilar from the copyright laws of many other countries[1] – is problematic (e.g. Basalamah, 2001: 162). Moreover, copyright laws imply that full originality can exist and that a clear line can be drawn to separate original works from imitation and plagiarism. But, as Bruns (1980: 115) points out,

> between imitation and translation other categories (besides forgery) intervene: parody, adaptation, collaboration, quotation, allusion, diverse codes of attribution ('as myn auctour seyde, so sey I'), the utterance of commonplace matter, mnemonic storytelling (who could not extend this list?).

Many copyright laws include the category of derivative work: but they still rely on the clear-cut separation between original and imitative works, which in reality can prove to be more complex than expected. Venuti (1998: 65) highlights the contradiction between the goal of copyright laws

[1] In Italy copyright is the subject of law n. 633 (April 22nd 1943) subsequently modified by various amendments and regulations. The Italian Constitution does not refer to copyright explicitly.

to protect and encourage the creation of cultural and educational works while assuming that the authors of derivative works, like translations, should not share the commercial motives of other authors.

In order to understand the cases of Tarchetti and Luttazzi, the notion of foreignization is fundamental. Drawing on the work of Schleiermacher, Venuti (1995: 20-1) explains that a foreignizing translation aims to "send the reader abroad" and register the difference, both linguistic and cultural, that divides the target from the source. The action of translating a text through foreignizing practices is a way of revising the domestic canons and to question the status quo. Venuti states that, along with few other Italian translations of Gothic tales, Tarchetti's translation initiated a change that resulted in a significant reformation of the canon (1995: 185). Venuti (1995: 148) also demonstrates that there is a strong connection linking foreignizing translations and dissidence: both our artists have been considered dissidents by their contemporaries.

The term *transcreation* is generally employed to describe the process of creative translation usually carried out by poets. Drawing upon the work of André Lefèvre (1975), McClure (1991: 197-8) discusses the best strategies to evaluate the translations of poems and explains that transcreation is a form of close imitation attempting to retain the culture-bound elements. Thus what he calls "verbal fidelity" can be of minor importance if what is being translated is "a whole conception of poetry and set of poetic practices". This is why the notion of transcreation can prove helpful when analysing the work of Luttazzi, even if his works are not poems.

3. Criticizing the bourgeois

Tarchetti belonged to the *Scapigliatura,* a Milanese bohemian subculture. As Venuti (1998: 13) explains, he "aimed to shock the Italian bourgeoisie, rejecting good sense and decency to explore dream and insanity, violence and aberrant sexuality, flouting social convention and imagining fantastic worlds where social inequity was exposed and challenged."

Tarchetti was the first practitioner of the Gothic tale in Italy, through the appropriation of foreign texts. He adapted, reproduced, translated and even plagiarized texts by writers such as Hoffman, Poe, Nerval, Gautier, and Erckmann-Chatrian. These discursive practices – which could be reunited under the label "transcreation"- played a political function by

addressing hierarchical social relations and interrogating ideologies. Tarchetti's Gothic tales demonstrate how forms of appropriation such as translation can operate as political interventions (Venuti, 1992: 197).

It is precisely on the latter concept of political intervention through appropriation in the form of foreignizing translation that the parallel between Tarchetti and Luttazzi is drawn. Their points of resemblance can be introduced by reading their own words:

> It must not be forgotten that Italy, unique in the world, possesses a guide to brothels, that our licentious novels are reproduced and popular in France as well, that the men who write them enjoy every civil right and public admiration, and belong for the most part to the periodical press [whereas] the circulation of every political text opposed to the principles of the government, but consistent with those of humanity and progress, is immediately obstructed (Tarchetti, II: 534-5 in Venuti, 1995 - originally published in 1865).

> Satire seems to have disappeared because it is not allowed on TV in its free, unfettered state. Control of satire diminishes its impact. This is a uniquely Italian phenomenon that suffocates our country and makes it undemocratic. Television satire can be satire at its best, but it is not wanted. Hence the problem is political. The point is thought control. They want to be able to censor the ideas that they don't share. But then it is not satire anymore […] The scandal of satire does not reside in its indecent terms, but in the fact that its expressive freedom corrodes our prejudices. Prejudices reassure. Satire doesn't. (Luttazzi, 2009: 203, 206, my translation).[2]

The two authors believe in the necessity to protect democracy and encounter similar problems due to censorship – Tarchetti's second novel caused an uproar in the press and copies were openly burned (Venuti, 1995: 149). They criticize what they consider the real vulgarity of their country, that is, bourgeois hypocrisy and ignorance. Both authors introduce a new genre (Gothic tales and dark humour) and subvert bourgeois values by doing so. As Venuti (1995: 148) explains, foreignizing

[2]*La satira pare scomparsa perché non è più ammessa in tv nella forma libera che le è propria. In questo modo le tolgono impatto. È un fenomeno solo italiano che rende il nostro paese una provincia asfittica e poco democratica. La satira in tv fa picchi di ascolto, ma non la si vuole. Quindi il problema è politico. Il punto è il controllo delle idee. Loro vogliono poter censurare quelle che non condividono. Ma così non è più satira. […] Lo scandalo della satira non è nei termini indecenti, ma nel fatto che la sua libertà espressiva corrode i nostri pregiudizi. I pregiudizi rassicurano. La satira no.*

translation is a dissident cultural practice because it includes foreign cultures that have been excluded because of their own resistance to dominant values. Both authors knew English well and imported their style from Anglo-American sources, through a variety of cultural transformations that included transcreation, imitation and plagiarism. Both worked as translators as well: Luttazzi has translated three of Woody Allen's books and Tarchetti translated English novels – one of which was Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* (Venuti, 1995: 162).

Following Venuti, we can state that the force of their intervention in influencing the Italian canon and culture paradoxically resides in their strategies of imitation, rewriting and plagiarism:

> Tarchetti's text deterritorialized the bourgeois fictional discourse that dominated Italian culture precisely because it was a plagiarism in the standard dialect, because it passed itself off not just as an original Gothic tale, but as one written originally in the Italian of Manzonian realism and therefore foreignizing in its impact on the Italian literary scene (Venuti, 1995: 166).

3. Dark Humour and Politics

According to Simpson (2003: 85), those without power use humour to resist ideologically insidious discourse; and humour plays a particular function as a social-solidarity mechanism that helps to sustain communities in the face of repression by dominant institutions and individuals. The sub-genre of dark humour often aims to induce its public to reflect on contemporary issues. According to André Breton (1966: 25) Jonathan Swift was the initiator of the genre. As Bucaria (2009) explains, dark humour typically is not included in Italian comedy and, in fact, its presence is often backgrounded and toned down in translation (see also Pavesi & Malinverno, 2000).

Luttazzi's shows presented to a large public a kind of humour that many people had never come across before. Today there are many other minor stand-up comedians in Italy who propose a similar kind of comedy and are clearly inspired by an Anglo-American style, but Luttazzi is the only one who has reached such notoriety with dark humour. The presence of a strong Anglo-American influence on his style has always been evident and transparent to a minority of people familiar with such sources, and his

television shows were declaredly (Sansa, 2010) based on David Letterman's *Late Show*.

What follows is an example of a culturally adapted translation of a joke that was originally conceived by George Carlin[3]:

> Religion easily has the greatest bullshit story ever told. Think about it: religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man, living in the sky, who watches everything you do every minute of every day, and the invisible man has a special list of ten things he doesn't want you to do and if you do any of these ten things he has a special place full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever until the end of time. But he loves you. He loves you. He loves you… and he needs money! He always needs money. He all powerful, all perfect, all-knowing and all wise… somehow just can't handle money! (Carlin, 1999).

Luttazzi's version[4] is clearly based on Carlin's but it is in the conclusion that the Italian comedian inserts his own touch. Rather than translating "he needs money" as in Carlin's version, Luttazzi says God needs your "eight thousandth" which is the percentage of their annual taxes that Italians can choose to donate to the Catholic Church. Hence Luttazzi transforms a joke against religion in general into a joke against the Vatican and their economic interests in Italian tax legislation.

As Venuti explains when discussing the effectiveness of Tarchetti's reformation of the Italian literary canon through plagiarism (1995: 166), if Luttazzi's joke had been presented as the translation/adaptation of a foreign joke, it would have lost its force, while the fact that it is presented as the creation of an Italian artist makes it more effective in its influence on the national canon of satire. It is then possible to state that we can observe two trends: that of foreignization, which has already been

[3] A very well-known American stand-up comedian (1937-2008). His 1973 radio programme became the object of a court case – known as "Seven dirty words" - that was later employed to legally define "indecency". (Demas, 1998)

[4] *Veramente vorrebbero convincerci che esisterebbe un uomo invisibile nel cielo che vede tutto quello che fai ventiquattro ore su ventiquattro, minuto per minuto, e quest'essere invisibile nel cielo ha una lista speciale di dieci cose che non vuole che tu faccia e lui ha una memoria di ferro e se tu durante la tua vita fai una di queste cose nella sua lista che lui non vuole che tu faccia lui ti manda in un posto pieno di fiamme a ustionarti a bruciarti a carbonizzarti per l'eternità. Ma lui ti ama. Ti ama e ha bisogno del tuo otto per mille.* (Luttazzi, 2002)

discussed, and that of domestication, which Luttazzi employs to transform the final punch-line into something relevant only to an Italian tax-payer.

Some clarification about the notion of "joke" may prove useful: if we refer to the works of Davies (2005), a sociologist, or Oring (2003), an anthropologist, what they mean by "joke" mainly corresponds to short, amusing and often politically incorrect stories with a punch-line that people tell in order to make their listeners laugh. It could be argued that Luttazzi is a joke-teller, and that jokes have no author (Davies, 2005: 6). Nevertheless the whole debate stirred by the accusation of plagiarism was possible because - according to his detractors - Luttazzi should have written his jokes autonomously and the process of transcreation or the enrichment he brought to Italian comedy with dark humour were not considered as creative, but rather as a series of acts of theft of non-anonymous jokes. However, even if it would certainly be interesting to analyse Luttazzi's production from that perspective, such analysis goes beyond the scope of this paper.

4. The facts

Luttazzi's style of humour is far removed from the expectations of the Italian viewers, as he often uses strong explicit sexual metaphors in his sketches and he jokes about topics that generally considered taboo, at least on mainstream channels, such as religion. He is often presented as a controversial figure for several reasons. In 2001 and in 2007 he anchored two television shows: the former was not confirmed for a second season and the latter was blocked before the sixth instalment. Both shows were very successful and were interrupted for reasons related to politics.[5]

[5] The 2001 show was suspended when Berlusconi declared that Luttazzi was "making criminal use of public television" after Luttazzi had interviewed a journalist – Marco Travaglio – who reported various facts concerning Berlusconi, including the accusations of his links with Mafia. Berlusconi later sued Luttazzi, but Luttazzi won the case in 2005. The 2007 show, which at first was supposed to last ten instalments, was on LA7 and was blocked before the sixth instalment. At that time LA7 was the only important private channel that did not belong to Berlusconi nor broadcast by a pay-TV provider - hence the only real private competitor for Berlusconi. The official explanation was that one of his jokes had offended Giuliano Ferrara, a journalist also working for LA7, but Luttazzi convincingly argues LA7 was not ready to accept the monologue about Pope Joseph Ratzinger he had prepared for the following instalment: the show was transmitted twice before being suspended, the suspension was communicated after LA7 learned about this

The close similarity that some of Luttazzi's jokes bear to sketches by George Carlin, Bill Hicks, Chris Rock, Emo Philips and Robert Schimmel, among others, had already been the object of controversy[6]; but the case exploded in June 2010 when an online video (available on Torrenthound.com) – showing some passages in English and in Italian which were almost identical – caught the attention of several journalists. In January 2008 an anonymous blogger had started to collect some quotations from Luttazzi's shows and books, which closely echoed jokes from the aforementioned American comedians. Other bloggers started contributing to the collection and the page where they uploaded the passages that they thought had been plagiarised grew to about 59,300 words long in March 2012 (Ntvox, 2012). In 2010 one of the bloggers decided to create a video which was uploaded several times on YouTube and repeatedly removed.[7]

The Italian newspapers *Il Giornale, Il Riformista*, *L'Unità,* and *La Repubblica* published articles accusing Luttazzi of plagiarism, while *Il Fatto* was the only newspaper to publish an interview (Sansa, 2010). The video was made available on the peer-to-peer Torrent website and embedded in the newspapers websites. In September 2010 it was broadcast on one of Berlusconi's commercial TV channels. On 15 October 2010 Luttazzi decided to comment on the whole issue on his blog[8]. Luttazzi also seems not to consider "translation" a creative act in itself. In fact, in the interview (Sansa, 2010) published in *Il Fatto*, Luttazzi provided a complex explanation drawing on semiotic theories (for which he was accused of intentionally being too obscure) but the word "translation" was not even mentioned. He talked about "calchi e riscritture" (calques and rewriting) which are not likely to make readers think about translation.

monologue (Palestini, 2007).

[6] Luttazzi reports the various steps of the accusations on the current abridged version of his website: http://danieleluttazzi.blogspot.it/2011/07/luttazzi-smascherato-10-giugno-2010.html

[7] The video is currently available for download on Torrenthound.com, and the Ntvox blog provides a link.

[8] Luttazzi's blog was subsequently removed from the Web, the address used to be http://www.danieleluttazzi.it The same address now opens his Twitter account. An abridged version of the blog was later made available and this page reports Luttazzi's point of view: http://danieleluttazzi.blogspot.it/2011/07/luttazzi-copia-ovvero-tecnica-della.html

5. Political issues

Before reporting the reactions of fans and the general public, it is necessary to point out how the whole debate was inextricably influenced by political issues. Both the first newspaper to publish an article about the video (*Il Giornale*) and the television channel on which the video was broadcast are owned by the Berlusconi family. But also Fornario (2010) writing in *L'Unità* – a left-wing newspaper – framed the case as political by stating that at first she did not believe in the accusation of plagiarism and thought it was a case of simple defamation. Interestingly, both the author of the blog and the author of the video who accuse Luttazzi of plagiarism explicitly declare themselves distant from any political exploitation; Ntvox blog declares this in its header above every page (Ntvox) and the video specifies this with a written statement (Torrenthound.com).

Luttazzi, though, claimed that the attack was made by Berlusconi's supporters and insinuated that it had a political goal. He had, in fact previously, been the object of groundless accusations in the past and had won a court case against Berlusconi. In the post published on his blog on 15 October 2010, Luttazzi foregrounds the conspiracy theory. He recounts the various steps of the case and implies that this *rappresaglia* (retaliation) was a response to his very successful monologue in March 2010 during a programme called *Raiperunanotte*[9] "2010: two months after my success in *Raiperunanotte*, which was not well digested by many, someone sparked off the **retaliation** posting on *Youtube* a defamatory video showing what the 2008 blog defined "*Luttazzi's plagiarisms"* [my translation]." [10]

The monologue consisted in a very strong criticism of Berlusconi (who was prime minister at the time) and included a detailed description of all the investigations about Berlusconi's objectionable business dealings – of course in a stand-up comedian style – but still well-documented and clearer than most mainstream information circulating in Italy at the time.

[9] *Raiperunanotte* was a show organized on 25th March 2010 as a protest against the decision to suspend Rai's political talk-shows during the campaign for the regional elections. The show, streamed online in real time and broadcast on Sky television, proved very successful.

[10] 2010: due mesi dopo il mio successo a *Raiperunanotte*, che è andato di traverso a molti, qualcuno fa partire la **rappresaglia** postando su *Youtube* un video diffamatorio che mostra quelli che il blog del 2008 definiva *"i plagi di Luttazzi"* [bold type and italics in the original]

6. Reactions and Conceptions of Translation

Tarchetti and Luttazzi are separated by one hundred fifty years. Today's audiences have the technical tools and the language skills required to carry out a comparative analysis that used to be in the realm of academia. But, of course, Venuti's academic analysis of Tarchetti's work provides insights into the history of copyright and translation-related issues which cannot be found in the thousands of words fans wrote to criticize or to defend Luttazzi.

Two parallel approaches were followed in order to investigate the point of view of the fansubbers and the people who were commenting on the issue in blogs and social networks. The three main Comedysubs fansubbers and the person who assembled the video were interviewed individually by email, making a total of seven emails. As for the social networks comments, a corpus-based quantitative approach was ruled out as it would have been extremely difficult to guarantee representativeness, given the fleeting nature of comments which were often edited, cancelled or censored and also repeated on different pages, thus posing redundancy-related challenges. Hence the comments were observed through a qualitative approach, with regular monitoring of the ongoing discussions while paying particular attention to the way the notion of translation was (rarely) discussed.

The observation of the comments revealed that the generally held opinion is that there is no difference between copying and translating, that the act of translation and adaptation to the target audience is hardly ever taken into account as a creative act itself. The same happens when jokes are recontextualized, i.e. taken from the original creators and blended together within original text to create a new show. Here are two extracts from the comments to Fornario's article on June 10 2010. They represent the two main attitudes that were observed: "translating" as a synonym of "copying" on the one hand and the notion that everything is copied from something else on the other hand.

"HE COPIED 500 JOKES WHICH CORRESPOND TO 10 HOURS OF SHOWS! How can you be so naïve and keep defending him? Can't you see that Luttazzi not only stole jokes from famous comedians but also cheated all RAI subscribers? […] There is nothing wrong in copying or

translating a joke but you must declare who the original author is". [my translation] [11]

"does anything exist which is not a quotation, a copy, a rearrangement of something else that was there already? is it not enough to remember that any book ever written is based on one of the 7 possible narrative models? well... I pity you, you point your finger at the copier and call him "crap" when you don't even know what copying is." [my translation - lack of capital letters as in the original][12]

All this could not have happened 15 or 20 years ago: the Internet was the essential medium that allowed Luttazzi's fans first to discover the comedians from whom he took the jokes and then to distribute the results of their work, whether in the form of subtitling the American comedians' videos, comparing the jokes or uploading the video about supposed plagiarism. When Luttazzi started working as a comedian (his first significant work is from 1989), the possibilities that his audience would come into contact with American comedians were scarce. The possibility that those few would also recognize the similarities and even get a chance to distribute their observations was even more remote.

The online medium did not only allow those who recognized the similarities to report their findings, but it also allowed them to meet on-line and work together, while remaining anonymous. Of course, nowadays it is also easier for researchers to interview people and record their point of view, in this case by exchanging emails with three members of the fansubbers community Comedysubs and with the author of the video.

The fansubbers declared that their goal had nothing to do with Luttazzi. Their website, ComedySubs, was in fact created after the Ntvox blog, although they recognized that their work helped the bloggers. Roberto Ragone, the founder of ComedySubs, in a private email pointed out that access to their website had "quadrupled" after the "scandal", in part because their website was credited at the end of the video. When

[11] *HA COPIATO 500 BATTUTE CHE CORRISPONDONO A 10 ORE DI SPETTACOLO! Ma siete tanto ingenui da difenderlo ancora? Ma vi rendete conto che Luttazzi non solo ha rubato le battute di comici famosi ma ha truffato anche tutti gli abbonati RAI. […] Non c'è niente di male a copiare o tradurre una battuta ma bisogna dire almeno di chi è.*

[12] *ma esiste davvero qualcosa che non sia una citazione, una copia, un rimpasto di qualcos'altro che esisteva già? non basta ricordare che qualsiasi libro mai scritto alla fine si rifà ad uno dei 7 modelli narrativi possibili? boh. mi fate pena a indicare come "cacca" colui che copia, quando non sapete neppure cosa sia copiare.*

asked if he thought that Luttazzi's plagiarism had brought Italian audiences closer to the American comedians, his answer was that "the discovery of Luttazzi's plagiarism has brought people closer to foreign satire, not the plagiarism in itself" implying that the Italian audience should not thank Luttazzi for importing foreign satire, but the ones to thank are those who denounced his plagiarism.

The second point that deserves attention is the ability of the fansubbers to create good quality subtitling (see also Massidda, 2012 and Vellar, 2011). Of course, the fact that fans of a specific genre become amateur translators is nothing new but, thanks to the Internet, the fansubbers are able to distribute their work on a different scale, compared to the past. For example, Fruttero and Lucentini – Italian writers, translators and editors – used to publish and comment on the amateur translations of science-fiction stories which were sent to them by readers of their magazine *Urania*. (Fruttero & Lucentini, 2003: 31-60).

However, in general, translations done by the fansubber community reach the public without the filter of any professional revision, and most viewers might infer that the subtitling was done by professionals, unless they make the effort to visit the Comedysubs website and read the disclaimer. From the point of view of the translation scholar this aspect is relevant because of the way in which it blurs the boundary between professional and non-professional translation (see also Pym, 2012).

Importantly, the opinions these amateurs express in the email interviews clash with the general attitude of considering translation a mere copy and paste operation: in their view the result of their work is often described as hard to achieve and superior to professional translation. Adrien – one of the fansubber's interviewed – answered the question about how he had learnt his English so well by stating [which I have translated following his flexible use of capitalisation and punctuation]:[13] "i've learnt English because of a personal crusade of mine against dubbing, in the last 4-5 years I've been watching films and TV series only in English, so I've learnt it a little. when I can't do it there's always the dictionary: it is more important to know Italian than the source language to make a good translation. and then there's passion, and with passion no university can compete. the comedian giardina was telling me last night

[13] Adrien also wrote *perché* with a grave accent, which I believe is something a professional translator would hardly do, even in a private email.

[…] that one of his friends – a professional translator – could not translate the jokes as well as we do because she lacks the secret ingredient: love".[14]

The third translation-related aspect is the heated debate the issue generated online. On the one hand, this can be ascribed to the usual attachment between a satirical author and his/her fans (Simpson, 2003: 87) but, on the other hand, in this specific case, the heated debates are likely to be a consequence of the censorship Luttazzi has suffered in the past. In the eyes of the public, Luttazzi himself was playing two roles at the same time. One is that of the hero/star, described by Dwyer (2009: 49), who fights against censorship and risks his own career to make sure his public gets to see a certain kind of comedy and gets to know more about certain lesser-known issues. The other role is that of the artist who is only interested in his own economic gain.

To my knowledge, the American authors from whom Luttazzi took his jokes have not started any legal action against him[15]. Nevertheless, most of the criticism coming from one-time fans is based on copyright-related issues, since they argue that Luttazzi has built his economic fortune on other people's work. On the other hand, many of the fans who wanted to protect Luttazzi often answered the accusations by saying that every author copies, hence it is not a problem.

Whether we believe Luttazzi's view that the whole attack was part of a political defamation campaign from Berlusconi's supporters or we think it was a genuine reaction from one part of his previously affectionate audience who felt disillusioned, what is interesting from our perspective is that the debate did not include the point that translation was a creative act itself. Luttazzi himself decided not to use this argument to defend his work. It would seem that the general opinion was that transcreating covertly is wrong because copyright laws say so, then some decided to stop being fans while some others decided to "pardon" Luttazzi. Hence

[14] *ho imparato l'inglese per via di una mia personale crociata contro il doppiaggio, è da 4-5 anni che guardo solo film e telefilm in inglese, quindi un po' l'ho imparato. dove non arrivo io c'è sempre il vocabolario: è più importante sapere l'italiano che non la lingua di partenza per fare una traduzione per bene. e poi c'è la passione, e di fronte a quella non c'è università che tenga: mi diceva il comico giardina ieri sera […] che una sua amica traduttrice professionista non riusciva a rendere bene come noi le battute che le capitò di tradurre perchè era manchevole dell'ingrediente segreto: l'amore.* (private email)

[15] As the case was reported abroad, the stand-up comedians involved (or their heirs) are likely to be aware of the issue. In Britain it could be found on the Chortle website – described as "a guide to comedy in Britain" – and in the USA Luttazzi was included among the "World's worst" in Keith Olbermann's *Countdown* show on Msnbc. Emo Philips (one of the 'plagiarized' comedians) commented the story on his Facebook page.

this event appears as a case in point in how copyright laws contribute to keep the practice of translation and transcreation on the margins; as Venuti (1998: 50) explains, according to copyright laws "a translation can never be more than a second-order representation, […] forever imitative, not genuine, or simply false."

Moreover, those who attacked Luttazzi argued that "he always complains if another Italian comedian uses his jokes" and, in particular, Luttazzi criticized Bonolis, a television anchorman, for having repeated on television a joke from his show which then turned out to have been taken from Carlin, as shown in the Torrenthound video. But as Venuti (1998: 64) points out, "[a] translation, insofar as it is written in a different language for a different culture, does not limit the potential market for the foreign text in its own language and culture." Luttazzi did not damage Carlin's potential market, but Bonolis did damage Luttazzi's potential market by repeating Luttazzi's joke on television. Moreover Bonolis had access to a much wider Italian public compared to Luttazzi, who was by then only working in theatres.

According to Jenkins' analysis (2006) of the positive effects of unauthorized copying of Japanese animation, piracy and fan communities can prove a profitable way to "publicize their releases, recruit new talent, and monitor shifts in audience tastes". The comment posted on Facebook by the author of the video, (21/09/2010) the day after *Le Iene* talked about the Luttazzi scandal, seems to confirm Venuti's and Jenkins' observations:

> The greatest satisfaction was not seeing Luttazzi run away, but watching during prime time – on one of the most important Italian networks – George Carlin, Bill Hicks and Robert Schimmel. [my translation][16]

7. Conclusion

I would argue that Luttazzi's case offers an interesting source for translation scholars to see how audiences often do not consider translation a creative activity but a mere 'copy and paste' practice. This opinion seems to change when one translates without earning money, as in the case of

[16] *La più grande soddisfazione non è stato vedere Luttazzi scappare, ma vedere in prima serata – su una delle più importanti reti nazionali – George Carlin, Bill Hicks e Robert Schimmel.*

fansubbers, who appear to believe translators need a quasi-devotional vocation in addition to creative abilities, as they underlined in their email interviews. It also reconfirms the contradictions highlighted by Venuti (1998: 65) concerning the way in which copyright laws assume that the authors of derivative works, like translations, are not envisaged as professionals who can aspire to commercial success like other authors.

Moreover, Luttazzi's production is an example of the way in which the transcreation of foreign authors can be employed as a tool to criticize and question certain attitudes and positions held in the target culture and to influence the domestic canon. As Venuti analysed Tarchetti's work in a different place and in a different time, he was free to look at the positive and negative consequences of Tarchetti's transcreating practices without being influenced by the Italian political issues of the 1860s. Analysing the case of Luttazzi is, of course, different: this is why a parallel between a contemporary author and another one distant in time can prove very useful to reflect on current issues in a more balanced way. Moreover it reveals the relevant implications for culture, politics, translation and copyright laws that this case raises.

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